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Statement

by

Mr. Sven ALKALAJ

United Nations Under-Secretary-General

Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

at

The 75th session of the Inland Transport Committee

Ministerial Meeting

“Making the Euro-Asian Transport Network Operational”

Geneva, 26 February 2013

**Dear Ministers,
Distinguished Participants,
Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is a great honour and pleasure for me to welcome you all to this 75th jubilee session of the Inland Transport Committee and this meeting of Ministers of Transport. I am particularly pleased to welcome all the Ministers and other high-level delegates from countries and partner organizations.

It is widely recognized that a well-functioning transport system is essential for the growth and competitiveness of economies. Indeed, national economies depend on efficient, safe and environmentally-friendly transport more than ever before. But, as you all know, this is not an easy task. It requires not only financial resources, specific technical norms and regulations that ensure a high level of efficiency, safety and environmental protection, harmonized across countries and regions, but above all political commitments.

In this respect, the Inland Transport Committee fulfils a real need that is not performed by any other international organization. Indeed, it is you, distinguished members of the ITC who in this framework provide and agree on a large number of global transport norms and regulations.

One increasingly important dimension of the Committee's work is the development of Euro-Asian inland transport links. Globalization of economies and trade is generating a continuous increase in the transport of goods between Europe and Asia. At present, most of these goods are carried by maritime transport. However, given the continued growth of trade and the resulting congestion of the main ports and their hinterland routes, the development of Euro-Asian land transport links could provide a viable alternative for some cargoes and between some destinations in Europe and Asia. In addition and even more importantly, inland transport links between Europe and Asia provide an impetus for the socio-economic development of landlocked countries along those routes and for their integration into the global economy.

UNECE has been closely cooperating with designated national focal points from 27 countries over the last 10 years to implement a project focusing on developing

Euro-Asian transport links. As you may know, this project is referred to as the EATL Project. I am happy to report that the project has become increasingly attractive over time – and the project family now includes 29 countries. I would like to welcome new members Poland and Serbia!

This joint work has achieved numerous tangible results, including identifying main Euro-Asian inland transport routes, prioritizing infrastructure investment projects, as well as other accomplishments that will be presented this morning.

These outcomes, however, cannot be taken for granted. Development of Euro-Asian transport links is a long-term process that requires strong political will and the commitment of the countries concerned, as well as careful use of scarce financial resources. This makes it a complex exercise, requiring Governments to strike a delicate balance between internal and external factors. At this Ministerial Meeting not only will you have the unique opportunity to discuss the progress made thus far, but also to endorse the critical next steps and further actions required to bring the EATL project and its recommendations to fruition.

And, to mark the completion of another important milestone in the development of the project, today we will invite you to sign a declaration on continued cooperation to make EATL priority routes safe and efficient, and above all, to keep the EATL framework functioning as the platform for collaboration in order to reach tangible results on the ground.

We recognize that there are several agencies that have been implementing development assistance programmes in the countries along the Euro-Asian routes. UNECE wishes to create partnerships and work closely with these organizations. The task before all of us is so massive that we – first and foremost all of you, the countries, but also international organizations and financial institutions – should join forces and work together to produce tangible results in an accelerated way.

In that regard, it is worth noting that the Secretary-General of the United Nations has given a prominent place to transport in the 5-year agenda for his second term. Last year's Rio+20 Conference also highlighted transport as one of the important

sectors which can contribute to overall sustainable development. Triggered by these developments, the transport community has intensified efforts to include transport as one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which highlights the importance of your deliberations and discussions today.

Concrete results have also been achieved in order to arrive at uniform legal conditions for railway services along Euro-Asian corridors. Uniform legal conditions have existed for many years for road, air, inland water and maritime transport. The time is now ripe to also provide comparable business conditions for international rail transport. The “Declaration Towards Unified Railway Law”, that will be presented for your signature today, marks an important milestone in these endeavours. This declaration maps out a strategy for Governments and railway companies to work in parallel towards creating unified railway law. Until that has been achieved, we are supporting all relevant actors in quickly developing mechanisms that bridge the two existing legal regimes with optional contractual rules for Euro-Asian rail transport.

Let me conclude by emphasizing that your presence at this important gathering and your readiness to adopt and sign these two political declarations demonstrate the commitment and will to continue cooperation under the auspices of the United Nations aimed at developing efficient, safe and secure Euro-Asian transport links. Further work on these projects will increase opportunities for your countries to become better connected and integrated into the world economy, and improve prospects for land-locked developing countries.

I would like to assure you that the UNECE secretariat is ready and willing to do its utmost to support member States in their efforts to move forwards with the EATL Project. We intend to use all our experience and competences to fulfil our tasks and accelerate the development of Euro-Asian transport connections. By linking our efforts to those of our partners, I am convinced that we can make progress in developing these crucial transport links.

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